

## **In Search of A Slogan**

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One question from clients that has popped up frequently over the years is “do you think we need a slogan?”. The answer is a resounding “maybe”.

Slogans – also called tag lines – are the junk food of marketing communications. Most people crave them, they taste really good, but they usually offer little nutritional value. That’s because the people who create them usually fall prey to a host of factors that wind up taking what started out as a good idea and gutting it of any substance. Let me explain.

We’ve all heard the typical slogans for your basic GenericTech Corporation. They usually run along the lines of “Tomorrow’s (fill in the blank) Today”, or the even more innocuous “World Leader in (fill in the blank)”. Not surprisingly, I call it the Fill in the Blank Syndrome. Why *do* they all sound the same? Why such a profound lack of creativity? There are several reasons, none of them good.

The problem often starts with two key stumbling blocks: Ownership ego (a corollary of Founder’s Disease) and Death By Committee. Both can be fatal to the development of a useful slogan. Ownership ego usually results in a slogan that features the universe revolving around the company. This is perhaps the main reason we see so many “World Leader in...” slogans.

Death By Committee is equally serious and is often slower and more painful. Typical symptoms include widely varying goals, an inability to arrive at a consensus, an inordinate desire to please everyone, and just plain old inertia. The result is invariably the same – a vapid, empty slogan, utterly devoid of any real meaning.

## **What's a company to do?**

Well, the first thing is to ask yourself, “do we really need a slogan? What is its purpose? What do we want it to accomplish?” There *are* sound reasons for creating slogans, such as positioning your company against competition and reinforcing a corporate attribute. A poor reason is “because our competitor has one”, or “because all real companies have one”.

If you decide your company really could benefit from a slogan, you will need to employ ruthless discipline if you hope to create one with real meaning and substance. That means avoiding hyperbole at all costs because your audience will immediately discount anything that smacks of boasting. After all, when was the last time *you* believed anyone who claimed to be Number One?

Instead, think about the “pain” your company’s products or services cure. Think about its position in the marketplace, relative to the competition. And be honest. One of the most refreshing slogans in the recent past was used by Panasonic, when they claimed to be “Slightly ahead of our time.” It’s real. It’s believable. It’s humorous. It’s everything that people admire in a person or a company. And in an industry known for its cutthroat competitiveness, it positioned the company perfectly against the competition. That’s brilliant.

Now, can you imagine the difficulty the marketing people and their ad agency must have had getting that approved? You can just hear the shouting, the scuffling, the tables being overturned. What company in its right mind would position itself just barely ahead of the pack? What sane person would not want to announce to the world that his or her company was clearly the best, way ahead of everyone else? It didn’t make any sense. Or did it? After all, if everyone says they’re the leader, what does that really mean? Nothing.

Instead, opt for the credible, a statement that does not automatically get called into question. Avoid chest-thumping and instead practice a little humility. Create

a slogan that informs your audience about the value of your company, about what you can do for them. About where you stand in the grand scheme of things. Show them real value. If you can do all of that, then you've got a slogan with substance.